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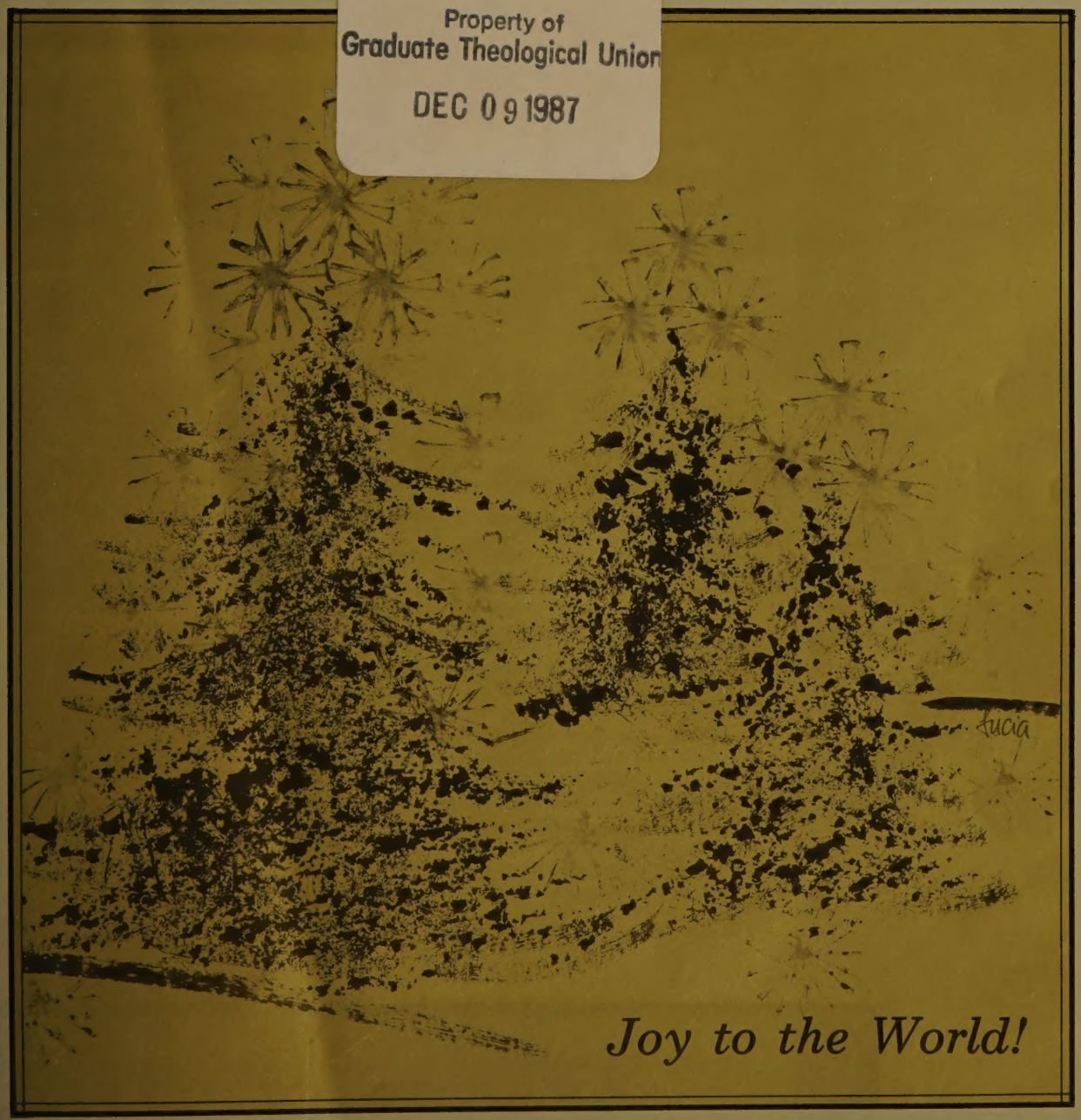

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4 *PILGRIM IN OUR LAND, PART II: excerpts from the talks of Pope John Paul II to the American people.*

8 *CHRISTMAS '87: a reflection by C Lubich.*

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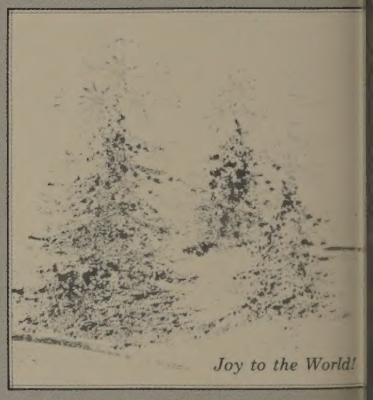

Joy to the World!

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WHAT IS CHRISTMAS FOR YOU?: interviews on the meaning of Christmas.

14 *LUMINOSA GOES ON: the experience of the sudden early snowstorm at the Permanent Mariapolis at Hyde Park, New York.*

16 *HOW THE NATIVITY SCENE ORIGINATED: a story recounting how Saint Francis staged what is considered to be the first reproduction of the crib scene.*

CONTENTS

	Christmas greetings from the Living City staff	2
Pope John Paul II	Pilgrim in our land part II	4
Chiara Lubich	Christmas '87	8
compiled by Phyllis Scaringe	What is Christmas for you ?	9
Sharry Silvi	Luminosa goes on	14
Oreste Paliotti	How the nativity scene originated	16
compiled by Dick Tetreau	On the mystery of the Incarnation	18
Matteo Silvan	Love is stronger part VIII	20

OTHER DEPARTMENTS

Dialogue	19
Word of life	24
Experiences of life	25

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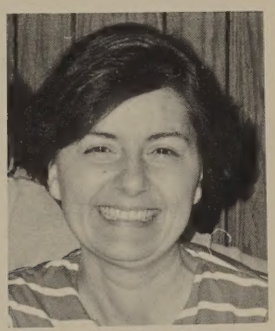

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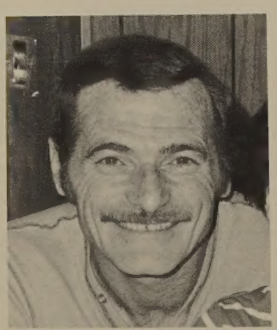

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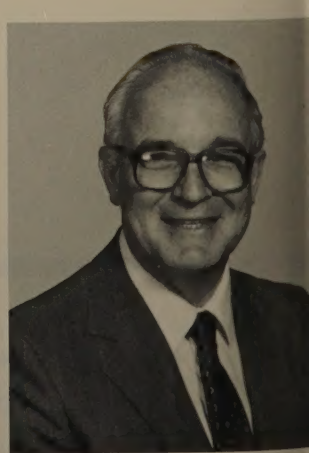


Daniel Jennings

Merry Christmas

and

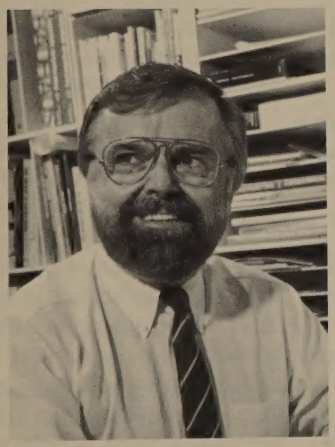
Happy New Year

from the Living City Staff

to each and everyone of you who read our magazine wherever you are.

We hope and pray that your Christmas may be a moment of joy, of peace, of God, and that the New Year may be a new beginning, a step ahead in the Holy Journey of life.

Posie Bansbach, Denise Silva



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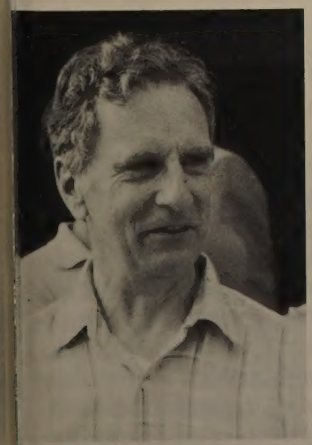


Richard Tetreau

Bernadette Raha

Vera Giannini

Pilgrim in our land

Part II

We continue our publication of excerpts of Pope John Paul II's addresses to the American people as he crossed our land.

To Communications Specialists in Los Angeles

You represent *one of the most important American influences in the world today.* You do this in every area of social communications and contribute thereby to the development of a mass popular culture. Humanity is profoundly influenced by what you do. *Your activities affect communication itself:* supplying information, influencing public opinion, offering entertainment. The consequences of these activities are numerous and diverse. You help your fellow citizens to enjoy leisure, to appreciate art and to profit from culture. You often provide the stories they tell and the songs they sing. You give them news of current events, a vision of humanity and motives for hope.

Your work can be *a force for great good or great evil.* You yourselves know the dangers, as well as the splendid opportunities open to you. Communication products can be works of great beauty, revealing what is *noble and uplifting* in humanity and promoting what is just and fair and true. On the other hand communications can appeal to and promote what is *debased* in people: dehumanized sex through pornography or through a casual attitude towards sex and human life; greed through materialism and consumerism or irresponsible individualism; anger and vengefulness through violence or self-righteousness. All the media of popular culture which you represent can build or destroy, uplift or cast down. You have untold possibilities for good, ominous possibilities for destruction. It is the difference between death and life—the death or life of the spirit. And it is a matter of choice.

It is within your power to use technology to promote what is deeply human and to direct it to the work of peace. You have *marvelous tools* which others lack.

Social communications must support human dignity because the world is constantly tempted to forget it. Whether in news or in drama, whether in song or in story, you are challenged to respect what is human and to recognize what is good. Human beings must never be despised because of limitations, flaws, disorders, or even sins.

Twenty years ago, my predecessor Pope Paul VI, speaking to a gathering much like this one, told that creative community in Rome: "It is a fact that when, as writers and artists, you are able to reveal in the human condition, however lowly or sad it may be, a spark of goodness, at that very instant a glow of beauty pervades your whole work. We are not asking that you should play the part of moralists, but we are expressing confidence in your mysterious power of opening up the glorious regions of light that lie behind the mystery of human life." (Allocution of 6 May 1967).

I would encourage you in yet another way: *to respect also your own dignity.* All that I have said about the dignity of human beings applies to you.

Daily cares oppress you in ways different from those arising in other kinds of work. Your industry reflects the fast pace of the news and changing tastes. It deals with vast

Mike Okoniewski

amounts of money that bring with them their own problems. It places you under extreme pressure to be successful, without telling you what "success" really is. Working constantly with images, you face the temptation of seeing them as reality. Seeking to satisfy the dreams of millions, you can become lost in a world of fantasy.

At this point, you must cultivate *the integrity consonant with your own human dignity.* You are more important than success, more valuable than any budget. Do not let your work drive you blindly, for if work enslaves you, you will soon enslave your art. Who you are and what you do are too important for that to happen. Do not let money be your sole concern, for it too is capable of enslaving art as well as souls. In your life there must also be room for your families and for leisure. You need time to rest and be recreated, for only in quiet can you absorb the peace of God.

You yourselves are called to what is noble and lofty in human living, and you must study the highest expressions of the human spirit. You have *great part in shaping the culture* of this nation and other nations. To you is entrusted an important portion of the vast heritage of the human race. In fulfilling your mission you must always be aware of *how your activities affect the world community,* how they serve the cause of universal solidarity.

On Love for the Poor to the Catholic Charities Representatives in San Antonio

The Church has always proclaimed a love of preference for the poor. Perhaps the language is new, but the reality is not. Nor has the Church taken a narrow view of poverty and the poor. Poverty, certainly, is often a matter of *material deprivation.* But it is also a matter of *spiritual impoverishment, the lack of human liberties,* and the result of *any violation of human rights and human dignity.* There is a very special and pitiable form of poverty: *the poverty of selfishness,* the poverty of those who have and will not share, of those who could be rich by giving but choose to be poor by keeping everything they have. These people too need help....

Indeed, where the pursuit of wealth is treated as the supreme good, human beings become imprisoned in the hardening of their hearts and in the closing of their minds (cf. *Populorum Progressio, 19).* For this reason too, the Church, in the very act of serving the poor and relieving their sufferings, must also continue to proclaim and serve their higher needs, those of the spirit....

Service to the poor also involves speaking up for them, and trying *to reform structures which cause or perpetuate their oppression.* As committed Catholics involved in helping to meet people's many concrete needs, you are still called to reflect on another dimension of ►

a worldwide problem: *the relationship between rich societies and poor societies,* rich nations and poor nations. Your insights must be prayerfully joined to those of many other people to see what can be done as soon as possible to purify the social structure of all society in this regard.

In the final analysis, however, we must realize that social injustice and injust social structures exist only because individuals and groups of individuals deliberately maintain or tolerate them. It is these *personal choices,* operating through structures, that breed and propagate situations of poverty, oppression and misery. For this reason, overcoming "social" sin and reforming the social order itself must begin with *the conversion of our hearts....*

When we are faced with the vastness of this duty of love, with the boundless needs of the poor in America and throughout the world, when we are disappointed by slowness and setbacks in the reform of structures and in our conversion, let us not lose heart, and let us not settle for what has already been accomplished. *Love can overcome great obstacles, and God's love can totally transform the world.*

On Freedom and the Family at the Ecumenical Prayer Service in Columbia, South Carolina

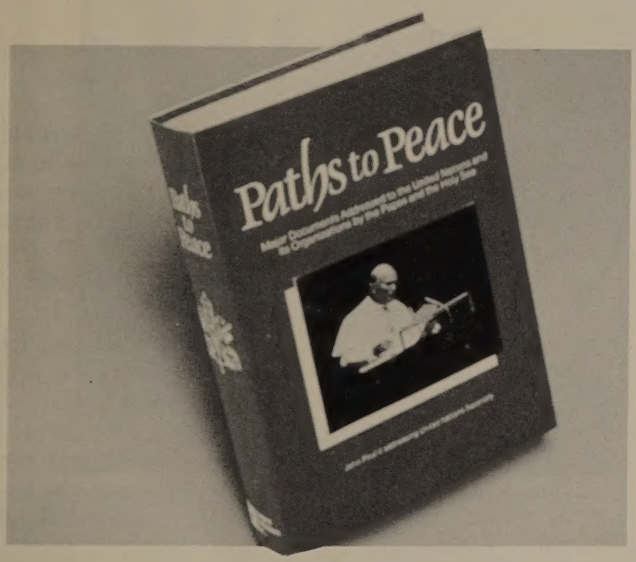
Like the Church the family ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and *from which the Gospel radiates to other families and to the whole of society.*

In America and throughout the world, *the family is being shaken* to its roots. The consequences for individuals and society in personal and collective instability and unhappiness are incalculable. Yet, it is heartening to know that in the face of this extraordinary challenge many Christians are committing themselves to the defense and support of family life. In recent years the Catholic Church, especially on the occasion of the 1980 Synod of the world's Bishops, has been involved in an extensive reflection on the role of the Christian family in the modern world. This is a field in which there must be the maximum collaboration among all who confess Jesus Christ.

So often the pressures of modern living separate husbands and wives from one another, threatening their lifelong *interdependence in love and fidelity.* Can we also not be concerned about the impact of cultural pressures upon *relations between the generations,* upon parental authority and the transmission of sacred value? Our Christian conscience should be deeply concerned about the way in which *sins against love and against life* are often presented as examples of "progress" and emancipation. Most often, are they not but the age-old forms of selfishness dressed up in a new language and presented in a new cultural framework?

Many of these problems are the result of *a false notion of individual freedom at work in our culture,* as if one could be free only when rejecting every objective norm of conduct, refusing to assume responsibility, or even refusing to put curbs on instincts and passions! Instead, *true freedom* implies that we are capable of choosing a good, without constraint. This is the truly human way of proceeding in the choices—big and small—which life puts before us. The fact that we are also able to choose not to act as we see we should is a necessary condition of our moral freedom. But in that case we must account for the good that we fail to do and for the evil that we commit. This sense of moral accountability needs to be reawakened if society is to survive as a civilization of justice and solidarity.

It is true that our freedom is weakened and conditioned in many ways, not least as a consequence of the mysterious and dramatic history of mankind's original rebellion against the Creator's will, as indicated in the opening pages of the Book of Genesis. But *we remain free and responsible beings* who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ, and we must *educate our freedom* to recognize and choose what is right and good,



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and to reject what does not conform to the original truth concerning our nature and our destiny as God's creatures.

Truth—beginning with the truth of our redemption through the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ—*is the root and rule of freedom, the foundation and measure of all liberating action* (cf. *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation,3).*

It would be a great tradedy for the entire human family if the United States, which prides itself on its consecration to freedom, were to lose sight of the true meaning of that noble word. America: you cannot insist on the right to choose, without also insisting *on the duty to choose well, the duty to choose the truth.* Already there is much breakdown and pain in your own society because fundamental values, essential to the well-being of individuals, families and the entire nation, are being emptied of their real content.

And yet, at the same time, throughout this land there is a *great stirring,* an awareness of *the urgent need to recapture the ultimate meaning of life and its fundamental values.* Surely by now we must be convinced that only be recognizing the primacy of moral values can we use the immense possibilities offered by science and material progress to bring about the true advancement of the human person in truth, freedom and dignity. As Christians our specific contribution is *to bring the wisdom of God's word to bear on the problems of modern life,* in such a way that modern culture will be led to a more profoundly restored covenant with divine Wisdom itself (cf. *Familiaris Consortio, 8).* □

Christmas '87

In these days of Christmas
a spiritual warmth
invades our hearts.
There is something new in the air,
unlike any other moment
of the year.
Something is about to happen ...
not all speak about it,
but all sense it ...
We couldn't think of a year
without Christmas.

CHIARA LUBICH

WHAT IS CHRISTMAS FOR YOU?

It is just what we need at Christmastime ... to pause for a moment and reflect—as these persons have done—on Christmas's meaning for ourselves. ... And what is Christmas for you?

compiled by Phyllis Scaringe

Archbishop Pio Laghi, apostolic pro-nuncio to the United States. (Washington, D.C.)

Whenever I meditate on the true meaning of Christmas, I am reminded of a phrase of Saint Bernard. The saintly abbot of Clairvaux wrote that "If the Son of God had not become man, had he not come into our midst, then what kind of an image would I be likely to have of God if not that of an idol, the result of my fantasy?"

But the Son of God became incarnate, and in so doing he also became the object, or perhaps more properly the subject, of my thoughts, of my affections, of my memory and even of my imagination. The Incarnation has made God accessible to me. The Son of God, in his human nature, becomes visible, conceivable, and, to some degree, comprehensible.

Christmas signifies that God is no longer the fruit of one's fantasy or imagination; it means that God has come to dwell among us, he is born in the flesh for us. Christmas means that God is Emmanuel—God with us. He is the child held tenderly in the arms of his mother, Mary, and he is now very near to me. Christmas means that I am now able to reflect better on God's presence and recognize that presence in the world in which I live. Christmas impels me to bend my knees in adoration before him as the shepherds of Bethlehem and the Magi from the East.

Let me conclude these reflections on Christmas with a passage from St. Paul's letter to the Colossians which summarizes well my thoughts. "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creatures. In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, things visible and invisible. He is before all else that is. In him everything continues in being. It is he who is head of the body, the church; he who is the beginning, the first-born of the dead, so that primacy may be his in everything" (Col 1:15-20).

Nina Beilina, Soviet Jewish emigrė, violinist.

Although I have no religious feeling about Christmas, I love the atmosphere of peace and love and kindness that is in the air.

ROTEM

Nina Beilina

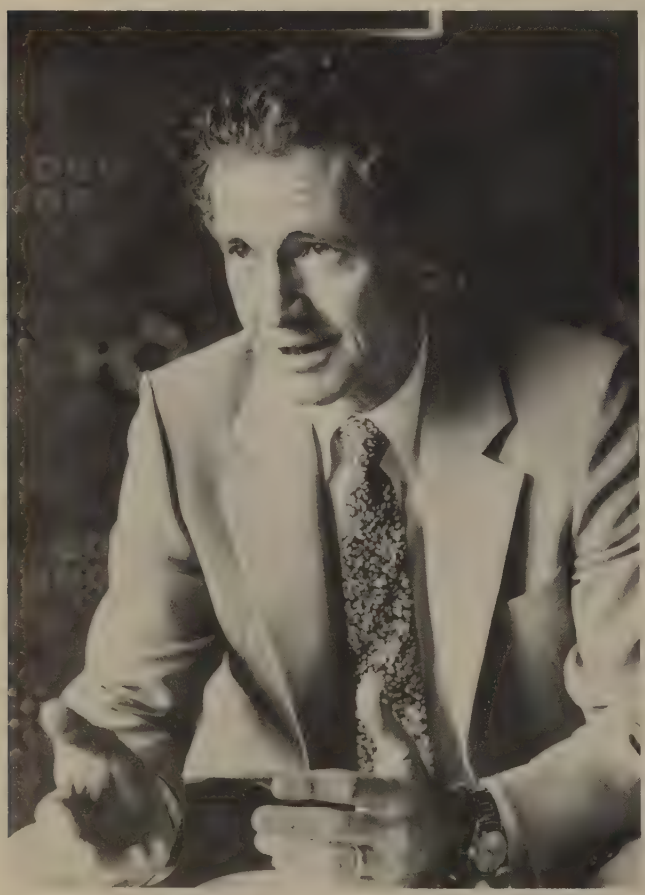
I like the giving of gifts because when you give it is "something from the heart."

Perhaps I am particularly sensitive to this holiday and to its tradition because when I left Russia my first stay away from that land of unhappiness was in Italy. I spent several months in Rome and I will never forget the love and warmth my son and I received from the Italian people who took us in and helped us so much.

But here, too, in New York and everywhere in America I have found so much love. The noise and commercial part of it are only exterior. In their hearts the people are sincerely loving and warm especially at Christmas time. ►

Enrique Johanet, M.D. (Chicago, Illinois)

Christmas always brings out what is best and most noble in me. It is a season when I feel more giving and more united with my fellow humans than at any other time of the year. It is also a time of reflection on the mystery of the Incarnation, God taking on a human dimension not only to show us the way but also to elevate our humanity towards the dimension of the divine.



John Mack Carter

John Mack Carter: editor-in-chief, Good Housekeeping Magazine

I happen to be in a business that works on developing Christmas features almost twelve months a year, so one might assume that the arrival of Christmas on the calendar might find me burned out. Nothing could be further from the truth. The gentle traditions of Christmas are more meaningful to me now than ever because they signal a celebration of the inner mind that is richer than anything in Tiffany's windows. When I step up the ladder to hang the angel on the tip of the tree, or slip back to eat the fruitcake from the plate left for Santa, my father lives again so clearly in my mind. When I spoon the oyster stuffing from the turkey's cavity, or repeat the family blessing over Christmas dinner—my mother's roles—her face looms yet as part of the tableau.

Christmas is more than a holiday for me.

Dr. Monika Hellwig: professor of theology at Georgetown University, Washington D.C. and past president of the Catholic Theological Society of America.

... It may be true to say that Christian people know the meaning of Christmas long before they begin to think about it explicitly or to give it a careful definition. The meaning of Christmas is the wonderful hospitality and friendship of God, which we are invited to receive and to share in our turn with others. It gives the discovery of solidarity and community not only with those whom we recognize as being like ourselves, or whom we choose as our friends by cultural and personal preference, but also with the stranger and the unforgotten and the despised, with those whose poverty and powerlessness makes them socially invisible and politically insignificant....

Vera Danyluk

Vera Danyluk: mayoral candidate for the town of Mont Royal, Montreal, Canada.

... For me Christmas is a time of peace, a time of sharing, a time of happiness and laughter but also mixed with a little bit of sadness because of things gone by in the past that we can no longer recapture.

Bob Rinere: president, Mark IV Press (Long Island).

In a recent meeting of the New Humanity Movement[1] in Rome I saw a new facet to the meaning of Christmas.

Dori Zamboni, a director of it, shared her belief that the beginning of a new humanity was at the first moment of the Incarnation of Christ, that from the very first moment God took on the form of a human he transformed humanity for all time to come. Humanity at that moment attained a new dimension it had never known before.

I, like many other Christians, have understood that the message of Christmas is love.... As part of the New Humanity Movement I experience a deeper awareness, calling not just for a passive recognition of the beautiful gifts God has given all of us but to an active participation in the effort of realizing this new humanity.

So Christmas for me will be a time of recollection and self-examination. A time for recommitment to the ideal of unity. Have I said my yes like Mary? Have I tried to be, like her, a "mother" to all starting in my home, for my wife and children? In my business, for my employees and customers? In all the other relationships that are a part of my life?

Many times my answer is: 'No, I have not.' But I know I must start again because I believe deeply in the hope of Christmas and, yes, a new humanity.

Newell Jenkins, conductor, musicologist, researcher of Baroque music (New York).

... Someone asked how could God permit the Savior of the world to be born in so lowly a place as a manger. What better place for such a miracle to occur! A royal birth in castle or palace is accompanied by fanfare, panoply and outer trappings and rich feasting. The material world would truly and could only have acknowledged its own in this way. But the gathering at the manger was of another sort. The simple shepherds, the keepers of flocks themselves gave homage to the Supreme Shepherd, whose flock is all mankind. The beasts of burden whose very breath warmed the child were servants of all mankind as was the man Jesus himself. And the humble donkey welcoming into the world the eternal king was the very animal who was asked to carry the king on Palm Sunday into the city of peace.

The judgment of Pilate many years later was already made that night in the answer to the question put to the Magi, "Who is this man?" We today are learning to recognize little by little the Christ in our neighbors. And as we do ask the question of each person we meet, "Who is this man?" we are learning to ask of ourselves the same question, "Who am I?" In order to find the answer we must go inside in silence and with faith....

Henry G. Cisneros

Henry G. Cisneros: mayor of San Antonio, Texas.

Christmas means family traditions. It means being with my brothers and sisters on Christmas Eve, watching children open Christmas presents on Christmas morning, and being with my in-laws on Christmas afternoon.

Christmas has had a special meaning for me in recent years because on Christmas morning I go on a tour of city hospitals and take gifts to children who are terminally ill. It is a surprise to them that someone wants to visit them, so it has become an important time for me. I take my two older girls with me. By visiting hospitals I try to overlook the glitz and materialism of Christmas and focus on the sparkle of human recognition that is closer to its real meaning.

Bill Kelleher: corporate attorney (Westchester, New York).

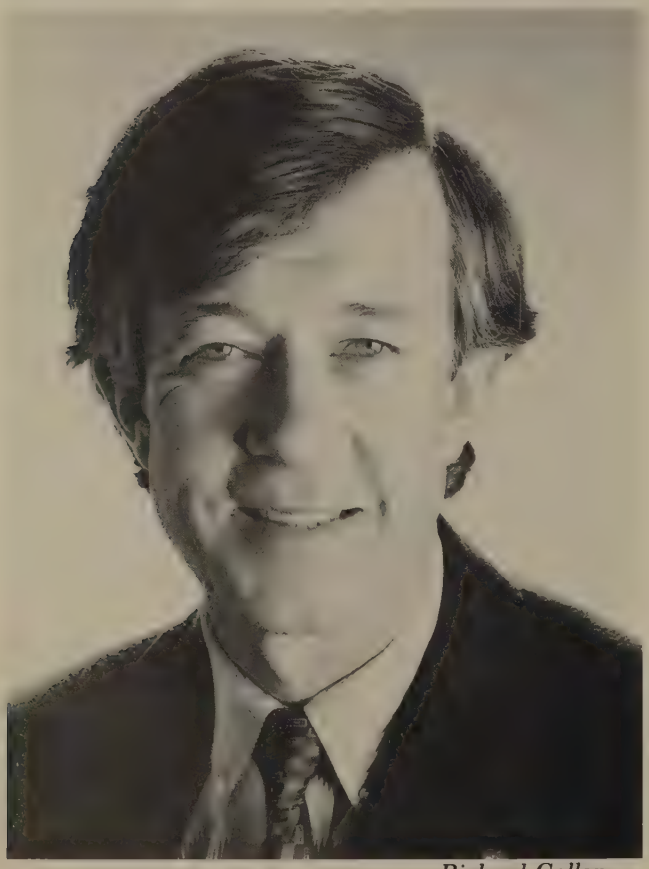
I'd like this Christmas to be a step closer for me in union with God, I'd like to reflect his love more in my association with others.

Holly Harrison: a 7th grader from Texas.

Christmas makes me feel special because God gave Jesus to us. ►

Richard Gallop: executive director, Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, Canada.

My situation is quite unique. I am an Anglican married to a Jewish lady. With our three children we celebrate both Hanukkah and Christmas. Therefore our festivities last for one month....



Richard Gallop

We also feel it is a time to open our doors to those who don't have a place to go at that time and our normal family of five becomes twenty on Christmas day. I feel it is also a time for people of all denominations to come together.

Rev. Katsuji Suzuki: minister of the Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center in New York City.

The Christmas season is always a wonderful time which reminds us of a very important message for humanity: service to others.

Derrick Derniere: director of music, St. George Anglican College, Toronto.

For me every message of hope lies in Christmas and, in one way, the very future of mankind. I would like to see a campaign entitled: "Give us back our Christmas."

Martha Uelmen: attorney mediator in family law (Santa Clara, California).

...I don't think gifts are as important to us now as they were when our children were younger. Now that our two girls go away to college our gift has become the fact that we are all together.

My husband and I are Eucharistic ministers in our parish and it was a very strong experience to serve at the Christmas liturgy knowing that with family in different places, my mother in a nursing home, we were all united by the Eucharist that day.

Liz Porter: teacher (Southampton, New York).

At Christmas time a united world does not seem so far away. Everyone seems touched somehow by a presence of God and it makes things like forgiveness and reconciliation suddenly become possible.

Jan Pokorny of Jan Hird Pokorny Architects and Planners, New York City.

When I think about Christmas I recall my youth in Czechoslovakia. Christmas was a family festival. We would go to Mass at midnight in a small church nearby. Although my father was Protestant and my mother Catholic, they met at that point.

Jan Hird Pokorny in front of Schermerhorn Row of the South Street Seaport in New York City which his firm restored.

Marilyn Boesch: teacher, housewife, mother of three (Washington, D.C.)

As a small child: presents, toys, a box that arrived as late as Christmas eve from a relative. My dad elaborating on the story of Santa Claus.

As a parent: All the preparations. The excited children. Staying up late wrapping gifts. Blocks that were being painted until two in the morning.

The creche. Christmas eve services with the family.A special midnight Mass with an elderly pastor.

"Incarnation". God becomes flesh. Jesus. Incarnation is a fact so real that it needs to be shouted from the housetops.

A God who loves so much as to become one with my humanity. A God who loves, a God who saves, a presence so enormous that it calls for a gift back, the gift of my "yes" to him, the gift of myself.

Dr. Harold Hayden: professor emeritus of art, University of Chicago.

From the earliest times men and women have feared the coming of the winter solstice when leaves die and fall, and days grow shorter and nights longer. They feared that the life-giving sun might set and not return. Christmas comes a few days after the shortest day and the longest night. Christmas brings the promise of new life and renewal. With the birth of the Christ child comes the assurance that the faithful will find the world reborn for another year. It is a time for celebration, jubilation, and the singing of praise. Christmas then is the hinge on which the world turns, swinging from decline to resurgence, a time when all of mankind can join hands and face the future with hope and brotherly love.

George Jellinek: musicologist, broadcaster and lecturer (New York).

By its very nature liturgical music is inspirational. But the music of Christmas even goes beyond that. From Bach and Handel and the Italian Baroque masters all the way through Stravinsky and Poulenc great composers have translated into music the message of peace and good will. And this is the message that music brings us at Christmas time to make that season really festive.

Robert Nelson: farmer, landscaper and carpenter (Long Island, New York).

Christmas for me is when the Saviour was born, born to save people. It is his birthday. Today people just think of giving and receiving presents but we should help people who need help. I give people pork for their Christmas dinner and share the joy of the Lord.

Gus Oemler: chairman of the department of astronomy, Yale University.

When I think of Christmas, the thing that comes to mind more than anything else are the words of a Christmas carol: "O Holy Child of Bethlehem descend to us we pray, cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today." I think of Christ being born in us again, not only 2000 years ago.

Aprile Millo

Aprile Millo: New York Metropolitan Opera soprano.

For me the birth of the infant Jesus is actually the first day of the rest of our lives really, because he changed the face of the earth and the face of many hearts. It was the day we gave birth to love, to honesty, to understanding, purity and everything really beautiful.

Jade Giacobbe: New England Telephone, central office clerical assistant (Boston).

I, probably like many people, have wished at times that Christmas was not just for one day but that it would last forever. Perhaps it is because we feel God closer to us, to humanity; we are more aware of his love and his presence.

Then I discovered that in trying to live a life of unity with others I experienced the truth of his words, "Where two or more are united in my name there am I in the midst of them." His presence among us makes it Christmas every day. □

1) See inside back cover

"Luminosa goes on"

by SHARRY SILVI

The experience of the sudden early snowstorm in our Permanent Mariapolis

We woke up in the morning and there it was. Snow on October 4th. "Luminosa"—our newest center in Hyde Park, New York—was white as if Christmas had come earlier this year and the time had come for carols and best wishes.

But it was not Christmas, and as it went on snowing a sense of anguish began to grip all thirty of us. Wet snow was covering the green, yellow and red leaves of the trees and the trees could not take the weight. There was thunder and lightning and heavy sounds of trees crashing to the ground, of branches cracking. We couldn't see what was happening, the falling snow was too thick.

I thought for a moment of the years it takes for a tree to grow, of the work that went into "Luminosa" and I had a knot in my throat.

I don't know why Saint Marguerite D'Youville came to my mind. She had sung the *Te Deum*[1] as she watched her hospital go up in flames. That was the thing to do then. And in our hearts we all did, certain that in his love, God would derive a greater good even from the storm.

But we are little, we are not Saint Marguerite, and we were spared the trial of total destruction.

When, hours later, we were able to go out and walk around, it was an apocalyptic scene which presented itself to us. Huge trees had fallen all around us, big branches had broken and were either on the ground or looming over our heads hanging by a thread. Power lines had fallen and were dangling ominously over the buildings or lying on the road. It seemed that a powerful hurricane had hit leaving no tree undamaged. But in the midst of such destruction no one was hurt and houses were spared serious damage. We went into the chapel to pray in thanksgiving; we prayed for those who might have been fearful, isolated, suffering in such a moment.

We were cut off from the main road since big trunks were blocking the way. The local firemen immediately responded to our call. They

"By candle light we shared our experiences; we spoke of our life, of unity which brings about His presence."

could opened the route enough to drive in half way but they walked the rest of the distance to invite us to move to the firehouse. We had no light, no heat, no water. It was something to see: the big man in his fire gear carrying a pan of rice and meatballs. Someone at the entrance—he said—had given it to him to bring to us.

So the meal was ready, we only had to serve it—and it tasted better because it was "providence." We did not go to the fire house. Howard and his son Paul also braved the journey to reach us and with them we cleared the rest of the road.

And then we gathered together. It was dark now. By candle light we shared our experiences; we spoke of our life, of unity which brings about His presence. All was quiet, the moon made the snow shine. We couldn't help thinking of the beginning of the Movement when everything was crumbling ... in the war.

God remains and God is love.

We would plant new trees. Luminosa goes on.

And we experienced the joy to be few, yes, poor, little, cold ... but His.

1) "Thee God," the opening Latin words of a hymn of praise and thanksgiving.

"Jesus is born today"

You are cordially invited to Mariapolis Luminosa to visit a display of Nativity Scenes from all over the world.

Dates and hours of display:
December 12 & 13; December 19 & 20
9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Come with your family and friends to this very special showing.

Mariapolis Luminosa 280 Cardinal Road Hyde Park, NY
Call (914) 229-0230 for further information.

How the Nativity Scene Originated

by Oreste Paliotti

This night is different. The old oak woods are filled with uncommon sounds: some nearby, some more distant. There is rustling and chattering, people calling to each other and children laughing; but over that are heard the sounds of hymns and Christmas songs.

Lights flicker among the trees like stray swarms of fireflies converging on a single spot. They are torches carried by countryfolk and shepherds flocking from Greccio and more distant villages—men, women and even children who defy the biting cold, wrapped up in their hooded capes of rough wool. The Friars are there too, coming in procession from their various local friaries and leading the people in singing the psalms.

The excitement grows as the farmers and shepherds arrive at the natural balcony of the Friary at Reati from where you can see the whole valley, crystal clear on this starlit night. The sounds on the hill are answered by a peal of distant bells, whose notes carry clearly in the crisp air, and also by the bleating of sheep safe within their folds.

Most of the crowd have arrived by now, and the scanty patch of grass in front of the grotto has very quickly filled up. Anyone eager to look inside must elbow his way forward or seek a precarious foothold on a branch or outcrop of rock.

Making his way through the crowd with difficulty Giovanni Nelita, the local landowner, arrives and stands at last before the grotto which is lit up, almost as bright as day, by countless candles.

It is only a very small cave, barely large enough to contain the manger with a small statue of the Child, a live ox and donkey on either side, and a small portable wooden altar, already prepared for the celebration of Mass.

Giovanni is filled with joy at the sight. He looks round for his friend Francis and sees him at last coming and going among the other friars, exchanging greetings with the people of Greccio who have a special place in his heart for where else has he been so much loved and his preaching so well received?

Francis has already put on the vestments of a deacon and looks around, happy with what he sees. Yes, this is what he had wanted. It will be a very special Christmas this year of Our Lord 1223.

Ever since his return from Rome, almost beside himself with joy over having received papal recognition for his rule, Francis had set everyone busily preparing for the approaching festivities. He had a great project in mind.

"My friend, this year should be the most beautiful Christmas ever," he had declared to Giovanni just two weeks ago. "In one of your woods, near the friary at Greccio there is a cave similar to that at Bethlehem. I would like to re-present the birth of Our Lord in it so that we may see with our own eyes the poverty into which he was born, how the manger was made into a cradle for him, and how he lay there between the ox and the donkey. Will you help me prepare it?"

Although Francis was used to contemplating supernatural mysteries it was not surprising that he understood this need to "see with our own eyes." Having recently visited the Holy Land, he was well aware of how actual and real-life objects can be a powerful aid to faith. This was why he wanted to provide for his followers a tangible representation of the Incarnation so that as many people as possible might be filled with his same fervor.

Giovanni, eager to fulfill the wishes of this man of God, immediately set to work. But not much preparation was needed since everything had to be done

St. Francis visited the Holy Land and returned to Italy with an even greater love for the humanity of Jesus. He wanted so much to render him present among his followers that he staged what is considered to be the first reproduction of the nativity scene.

with the utmost humility and poverty just as it had been at Bethlehem. This liturgical presentation was to be quite the opposite of some elaborate and bizarre productions which were, at times, put on to amaze the common people in public squares and in churches.

This was to be something quite different. The sacred representation was to be closely united with the eucharistic celebration in which the Incarnation is perpetuated and God incredibly makes himself available to all.

So the celebration begins. All eyes are fixed on the crib in which God appears as a tiny child next to the altar where, in a few moments, he will mystically but truly be born. It is all so simple, so obvious. It is enough to look, to take it in, to believe. Bethlehem is here, among country-folk and shepherds, just like those who responded to the angels' message from heaven.

In the silence of the woods, only the words of the celebrant, and the occasional hymns are to be heard. From time to time a gust of wind ruffles the oak trees bordering the grotto, and candles and torches seem to be on the point of going out, then however they revive and even manage to give some warmth. But who is bothered about the bitter cold on this extraordinary night?

By the flickering light, Giovanni contemplates these rough-hewn faces as they stare, absorbed in the mystery; their faces are strangely ennobled with the nobility of God's children. Giovanni, a man of noble birth, has learned from Francis where to look for true riches. This is the only kind of nobility that he now values. It is Christmas, revealing to all that we are brothers.

Now comes the long-awaited moment: in a strong and clear voice, Francis sings the Gospel. Then, laying the sacred book down, he begins to preach in the vernacular as his heart prompts him. The subject is the babe of Bethlehem, the king of kings who has made himself poor and humble out of love.

"We thank you Father, because you have brought about this birth of one who is at the same time true God and true man from the glorious and most Blessed Virgin Mary. From her he received the flesh of our frail humanity." How sweet the name "Jesus" sounds on the lips of Francis and how lovingly he talks of the child of the manger! All are moved to the heart.

"Although the Lord brought about our salvation on other feast days, it was from the day of his birth that he dedicated himself to saving us. Therefore, let every Christian rejoice in the Lord, and for love of him who has given us the whole of himself, be joyfully generous not only to the needy but also to animals and birds...."

A blessed peace settles upon minds that now forget every-

(Continued on page 28)

On the Mystery of the Incarnation

The following passages written by four of the early Church Fathers offer material for reflection on the solemnity of Christmas.

Gregory of Nazianzen (4th century):

Christ is born: glorify him! Christ comes down from heaven: go out to meet him! Christ is on earth: lift yourself up!

This is our feast, this is what we celebrate today: the coming of God among us so that we in turn can be with God, or more appropriately said, we can rise to be near him.

Leo the Great (5th century):

Today our Savior is born: let us celebrate. There is no room on this day for sadness because it is the birthday of life.

The birthday of Jesus is the birthday of peace. ...The world has its friendships which can bring those who are apart into a loving harmony ... but the peace of the spiritual person ... comes down from above and leads upwards. It resists all obstacles and flies to true joy. As the Lord said, "Where your treasure is, there also is your heart."

Chromatius di Aquileia (4th to 5th century):

The Lord is born in Bethlehem. It was only fitting that he be born in no other place but there because the word "Bethlehem" means "House of Bread." This name was given long before with prophetic vision because the very "Bread of Life" was to be born there of a virgin mother.

John Damascene (8th century):

Oh, daughter ever virgin that had no need of a man in order to conceive. The one who was conceived in you had an eternal Father.

Oh daughter who came from the earth and held the Creator in her divinely maternal arms! The centuries rivaled each other to be honored with your birth. But the pre-established will of God who created the centuries put an end to the rivalry.

You became, in reality, more precious than every other creature. From you alone the Creator received in inheritance the first fruits of our matter: his flesh from your flesh and his blood from your blood....

The God of the universe ... in the fullness of time called you into being, proclaiming you Mother in order to generate God and nourish His own Son.

ECUMENICAL NEWS

Day II in Columbia, South Carolina

September 12, 1987. Two-hundred of the ecumenical leaders who had gathered with Pope John Paul II at the stadium of the University of South Carolina for the "Service of Christian Witness" stayed on for another important ecumenical meeting the following day.

The meeting was co-sponsored by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Lutheran Church in America and was hosted by the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary.

The day began with a simple worship service led by the Rt. Rev. William A. Beckham, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina. Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, president of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, delivered the main address on "The Catholic Church and the Ecumenical Movement." Bishop James R. Crumley of the Lutheran Church in America offered the official response.

Mary Young

Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue in Venice

From August 1-8 a meeting of the International Commission for the Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue took place in Venice, Italy. Seven Catholic theologians from the United States, France, Italy and England were brought together by the Vatican Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity under the presidency of American Benedictine Rev. Kilian McDonnell.

For the Pentecostals twelve delegates of the classical Pentecostal Church participated coming mainly from the U.S.A. with two representatives from Canada and one from Holland under the leadership of the South African pastor Justus du Plessis. He succeeds in this post his brother, David du Plessis, a courageous ecumenical pioneer among Pentecostals and initiator of this dialogue who died last February at 82 years of age.

At the opening session David du Plessis' work was commemorated. He had participated in the Second Vatican Council as an observer and was awarded the "Medal of Good Merit" for his ecumenical work by Cardinal Willebrands on behalf of the Pope.

The classical Pentecostal Churches were formed in the early 1900's when a number of Christians from the Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian Churches who began speaking in tongues and prophesying were expelled from their Churches. Today the Assemblies of God and the Foursquare Gospel Churches are among the largest Pentecostal denominations in the country.

The Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue began in 1972 with what was to be the first of a series of five annual meetings (1972-1976) to the purpose of furthering knowledge and understanding of one another. The first meetings focused on Christian life and experience: the relationship between faith and experience, between the Holy Spirit, institutions and sacraments. In the final report coming out of that first cycle of meetings, the Pentecostal Church's contribution to prayer renewal was recognized.

In the second cycle discussions took up the themes of Scripture and Tradition, the Church as a praying community, Tradition and traditions, the role of Mary, the Ministry. We are currently in the third phase of meetings (1985-1989) wherein the concept of koinonia, the Church as communion, is being studied.

The theme of the Venice meeting, "Koinonia, Church

(Continued on page 28)

LOVE IS STRONGER

by Matteo Silvan

Life In 'Focolare' Part VIII

Lazarus Come Out, *a book published by New City Press is the autobiography of Matteo Silvan.*
Love is Stronger *starts where the other ended, with the death of his wife Teresa and with the beginning of a new chapter in his life. Up to this point, Matteo has recounted his dramatic spiritual journey. At fifty years of age, a family man at the peak of his career in government service, he nevertheless experienced a void in his life. One day he stopped to talk to two young women from the Focolare who came to visit his daughter. From here his journey took a decisive turn. In the Mariapolis he went into a crisis: he was too busy for God and yet His call was irresistable. We resume our story now after Matteo has gone to live in a focolare community.*

The great attraction

I was transferred to a new focolare community. Life in the previous one had become too easy. No one spoke of it openly, but I realized they were giving me special treatment. It was true that the doctors said I had reached the point of exhaustion and had prescribed rest and relaxation. This explained it all.

My brothers in focolare didn't let me do anything for fear that I would tire myself. And I felt uncomfortable, perhaps out of pride. If they had many things to do I would absolutely insist and then they let me do the dishes: it was no sacrifice for me. I would have wanted to do more in order not to be a burden to them and to experience the sense of poverty and obedience of a life given to God. But the other focolarini wouldn't hear of it. When the subject came up they would say: "Love implies not only loving others but also accepting love." That silenced me, but I did not give up. I wanted to be like the others in spite of my age. My desire was soon to be fulfilled.

In fact, shortly afterwards I moved to a focolare community in the center of Rome. I was happy about the transfer but disappointed about the location. There was never a moment of quiet in that neighborhood. The wall of the house in front of us was all we could see from our windows. We never had sunlight because the rooms faced north. The air was not good. On the street below us, cars stopped two across before going through the light and the exhaust fumes rose and polluted the air to the point that when I opened the window in the morning to change the air I immediately had to close it.

All this gripped my heart. And to think this was what I had wanted! There was a time that when, thinking of religious life, I associated it with a panoramic, serene locality surrounded by trees. The model I had in mind was Monte Subasio in a valley where there is a hermitage. I had been there many times while visiting my sister Maria in Assisi. I had always thought of it as the ideal place to live face to face with the mystery of God.

Once, while travelling by train to Perugia to take care of some unsettled financial matters, I passed the slopes of Monte Subasio and a wave of nostalgia came over me. I hurriedly tried to distinguish the valley of the hermitage but the train sped by too quickly. It was gone.

I sat there sad and pensive for a moment but then I pulled from my briefcase a little book of Chiara's meditations[1] in order to recollect myself in a higher and truer solitude. I randomly opened the book to a passage that seemed to have been written for me in that moment of my life:

This is the great attraction
of our times:
to penetrate to the highest
contemplation,
while remaining in the midst
of people,
shoulder to shoulder,
as one among many.

As participants in God's plans
for humanity,
to scatter glimmering points
of light among the crowds,
while sharing with our neigh-
bor his shame, his hunger,
his troubles and brief joys.
The attraction of our times,
as of all times,
is that which is, simultaneously,
most human and most divine:
Jesus and Mary.
A carpenter ... the Word of
God;
a housewife ... the Seat of
Wisdom.

I paused at length over the line: "*to penetrate to the highest contemplation while remaining in the midst of people.*" Gradually my soul unwound and I began to understand. Certainly, this is what I was told at the very beginning and it had won me over: a characteristic of the focolarino (or focolarina) is to remain in the enchantment caused by the discovery that God is love, God who, as a consequence, invites us to love everyone who passes us by even in the midst of a crowd.

A focolarino, as he ought to be, is a person who loves always and is therefore dead to himself and alive to Christ. This is, after all, a description of what every Christian should be, but the discovery of God-Love makes the focolarino "a child" in the Gospel sense. This is why people associated with the Focolare (from the beginning of the Movement) were called "popi" which in the dialect of Trent means "children" that is, people who know they are loved by a Father who follows them everywhere. They therefore recognize the interventions of his love in all the circumstances of their lives. Finally, a person disillusioned or disenchanted is not a focolarino, Chiara once said.

Fantastic! I was happy to feel a bit like that myself! Now I understood why I felt uncomfortable when someone treated me deferentially, as if I were ... a person who took himself seriously.

As to another aspect of the meditation about "remaining in the midst of people, shoulder to shoulder," I realized with surprise that the enchantment was still there. There was no conflict between the two tendencies: if I recognized Jesus in every person I met, I would always be in contemplation.

In fact, this is what had taken place within me from my first days in the new "focolare." I had already made friends with everyone in the neighborhood: the barber, the man at the corner store, the cleaners, the super. Moreover I was close to the street that ran alongside the Tiber River, the Lungotevere, and there I could stroll and meditate.

One day I made a sensational discovery. At that time of the year there were seagulls along the Tiber. Very beautiful! When there was a good wind they flew high with their wings outspread. They let themselves be supported, almost cradled, by the wind, and they moved with elegant turns and slides. I stopped to watch them in fascination and I often had to tear my eyes away and continue walking.

"I must confess. In the beginning of my new life it bothered me to hear about perfection...."

Perfect in unity

I must confess. In the beginning of my new life it bothered me to hear about perfection. I had never been a perfectionist. I tried to have Gabriele—the ►

center of unity in the new focolare—explain to me what type of perfection I was called to. In the gospels there are different levels of perfection. What follows is, in brief, what I understood.

Jesus, at the beginning of his preaching, invited everyone to perfection in mercy. In fact, after having said that his heavenly Father "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust," Jesus concluded, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."[2]

Then there is the well-known episode of the rich young man who observed the Law. He nevertheless asked Jesus: "What do I still lack?" and Jesus answered, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."[3] As we know, the rich young man lowered his head and went away.

There is also a perfection in humility: "I am among you as one who serves,"[4] Jesus had said. Without humility, virtue lacks foundation. Humility is the *humus* the fertile ground, which allows the seed to bear much fruit. Just observe Mary.

Lastly there is a perfection which starts in loving and reaches its culmination when it is fulfilled in the unity Jesus prayed for on the evening of the Last Supper: "that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one."[5]

Gabriele concluded saying, "We aim especially at this final aspect of perfection which logically presupposes all the others. Individually we are still very far from being perfect ... but as you well know, the desire to love is already love...." He looked at me to see my reaction. I was enthusiastic and exclaimed: "Unity in charity! It's the most revolutionary undertaking of all! I think that through these two words it will one day be possible to realize that 'global project of development' in which all the peoples of the earth should gradually partake with equal sharing of powers, duties, resources and responsibility....

"Oh, how you race ahead," Gabriele interrupted."Right away you jump into politics and immediately reach the ends of the earth.... Instead, let's begin with ourselves and then we'll see about the rest...."

"You're right ... forgive me," I answered. "You know how it is: a wolf can lose his skin but not his vice.... But explain one more thing to me. How is it that everyone—individuals, families, political parties—longs for unity and harmony and so few attain it? I understand it is a matter of living that compendium of virtues contained in the Gospel, but in practice, how should one act in daily life, within and outside the family?"

"As I said," Gabriele continued, "it is a matter of living love to its extreme consequences, to the point of sacrificing oneself. But if you want norms of a practical nature, I can mention a few:
—"to live the other" to the point that we no longer exist;
—to approach our neighbor with Jesus living in us, setting aside all our problems;
—to always love and forgive everyone beginning from those who live beside us: in 'focolare', family, or at work.

Only if each one of us, Gabriele concluded, is able to live like this, loving and serving the other, always, immediately and with joy, will the ideal of Jesus advance toward true peace.

Undoubtedly, detachment from ourselves and from our opinions (they can be expressed, of course, but only if given as a gift to the others) costs, in fact, it costs everything.... In recompense, though, we participate in the joy of being in harmony with everything and everyone even though we maintain our unique personality.

"I came to understand that not only did I have to change but I had to accept the shortcomings, the character of the others, devoid of any hint of annoyance...."

The pact of mercy

By now my health was restored and I was immersed in the life of the focolare. I saw that the reality was very different from what I had thought. For example, I came to understand that not only did I have to change but I had to accept the shortcomings, the character of the others, devoid of any hint of annoyance....

My neighbor, in fact, is not as I would like but as God created him.

I once heard a priest say that living together can at times be a martyrdom, but Jesus did not ask for less when he said: "Love one another as I have loved you." There is everything in that "as": calvary, cross, abandonment, and also his living with Judas beside him up until the last day.

My friends now took me back to an early experience of Chiara Lubich and her companions when they had to make, at one point, a kind of "pact of mercy" with one another. There was no other way to go beyond the misunderstandings, the defects and the differences in character, culture, age, and habit that sooner or later came up. They realized that only by always forgiving each other, by forgetting what might have transpired the night before, would they be able to live together in love. There would no longer have been peace in their hearts if even a speck of resentment, the memory of even a gesture of impatience or a worried attitude remained in one of them. It would have been necessary to pray more, love more, deny oneself more until the sun—which meant Jesus among them—returned to shine.

I meditated at length on this aspect of the life in 'focolare' and it left me thoroughly amazed and fascinated. Another reason for this was that this effort of being merciful toward one another is only a point of departure: if we really want to reach the fullness of love, it is necessary not only to deny oneself in the full sense of the word but also to personally grow in love and in the virtues. In the end when the self-denial has taken place and every worry sent away, one experiences the fullness of peace and joy.

Writing about mutual love, an experience I had came to mind. It happened when, in Trent, I stayed overnight in a focolare for the first time.

We were two in the same room. We chatted a while and then said the evening prayers. Before falling asleep the other fellow said: "Good night! Let's remain in mutual love ... each of us trying to recognize Jesus in the other ... okay?"

I answered in agreement and said "goodnight" but I immediately began to ask myself how we could live mutual love while we slept. Sleep takes us beyond reality, into the craziest dreams. Just the same I fell asleep.

In the middle of the night, the loud snore of my neighbor woke me up. I immediately became distressed: "If this continues, goodbye sleep," I thought. Besides everything else I have to get up early in the morning and if I don't sleep...."

But suddenly, as I tossed and turned, the last words of the evening came back to mind "Let's remain in mutual love ... each of us trying to recognize Jesus in the other." Well then, how could Jesus bother me?"

I rolled over, confused but happy: "Go ahead and snore, my friend, I'll sleep just the same!"

And I truly did. I woke every now and again but I knew the name of the game. I rolled over and went back to sleep in peace.

To be continued.

1) "Meditations" by Chiara Lubich, New City Press; 2) Mt. 5:45,48; 3) cf. Mt. 19:16,21; Lc. 18:18,22; 4) Lk. 22:27; 5) Jn. 17:22-23.

NEWS OF THE MARIAPOLIS

First Notice of Dates

Vacation Mariapolis
from July 23 after supper
to August 7 after breakfast
at Mariapolis Luminosa
Hyde Park, NY

Southwest Mariapolis
from July 10 after supper
to July 16 after breakfast
at New Mexico State University
Las Cruces, New Mexico

Midwest Mariapolis
from August 9 after supper
to August 14 after breakfast
at Hope College
Holland, Michigan

For further information contact
the Focolare Center nearest you
(see inside back cover for addresses)

WORD OF LIFE

"Rejoice always."

(1 Thes 5:16)

The word makes us live.

The word makes us free.

The word guarantees happiness.

The word converts.

The word purifies us.

The word draws us to our specific vocations.

The word brings forth the hatred of the world and the sanctity of the disciple.

The word makes us see the truth.

The word brings comfort.

The word gives us joy.

The word produces works.

The word gives wisdom.

The word preserves us from human concerns.

The word obtains everything.

The word brings about union with God.

The word gives us hope of eternal life.

The word makes us one.

The word changes one's mentality.

The word makes each soul a heaven.

"Rejoice always."

We find this exhortation at the end of the first letter to the Thessalonians.

The invitation to joy recurs often in the letters of St. Paul; it was one of the themes of his preaching. For example, to the Philippians he said, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice."

Undoubtedly for St. Paul, joy was one of the most beautiful expressions of Christian life. Joy could be said to be the distinctive mark par excellence and the most effective means of witnessing to it. Nothing, in fact, strikes others more or exerts a greater attraction than a person who is truly joyful.

"Rejoice always."

What is interesting to note is the form of the invitation, or better, the use of the imperative form that the Apostle chose to express himself. We could ask: Can you command a person to be joyful? After all, we know that life is full of problems and worries, which lead us to be anything but always joyful. It would seem more likely to exhort a person to cheerfully accept all that happens ... but joy is something else. Joy is a sentiment that spontaneously bursts forth from the soul.

"Rejoice always."

And yet there was a reason for St. Paul to assert that in spite of difficulties we must always be joyful: this joy is a result of living a committed Christian life which allows Jesus to live in us in his fullness; and in him we cannot but be joyful.

He is the wellspring of true joy because he gives meaning to our life, he guides us with his light, he frees us from every fear regarding the past as well as the future, he gives us the strength to overcome all the difficulties, temptations and trials we can come up against.

"Rejoice always."

There is however a secret to being always joyful. It consists in centering our lives on Jesus, living in a way that allows his presence to shine forth in us.

By now we know the path. Jesus lives in us if we strive to put his word into practice, in particular if we love him in every neighbor ready to give our life for each person as he did.

If our neighbor loves us like that in return, then our joy will be complete (cf. Jn 15:11) because Jesus will shine in our midst as well (cf. Mt 18:20).

The word of life for this month can help us to witness to this joy—the real joy of Christmas—and to communicate it to the world around us.

Chiara Lubich

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers shared with us.

A readily solved dilemma

Our next door neighbors with whom we shared many experiences of mutual love recently moved away. We wanted to somehow pass that love on to the new neighbors so we asked their family of six over for soup and sandwiches on the first night in their new home. We knew they were without any dishes or furniture yet.

We offered them a place to stay but they declined, so instead we shared blankets and a television with them.

We have looked for other ways to serve our new friends as a family. My son has become a good friend of the new neighbor's little girl. My oldest child babysits whenever she can and has now become the children's favorite babysitter. My twin boys who are four years older than their son have invited him to play often, even when they would rather be by themselves.

I have seen each of the children trying to love in this way.

It hasn't always been easy, we are nine in our household and time is always short.

Money is also tight for us so whenever an opportunity comes along that will give the children enjoyment, yet does not cost a lot, I like to take advantage.

A contest was advertised for children to dress up like clowns and send photos in to the radio station. The prize for the winners and their families would be tickets and a visit with the clowns in the circus that was soon to come to town.

I forgot to watch the calendar and before I knew it, the deadline was upon us to get the pictures taken, develop them and send them off to the radio station.

I remember feeling so tired that day. I was tempted to just forget about the whole thing. But Molly, my three year old, wanted her face painted, so I said "yes". I thought fleetingly about painting the neighbor's children too, but these thoughts quickly disappeared after doing three more faces on my own children. It takes about twenty minutes to do each one well and it was getting late.

It happened though that my neighbor's little girl came over to see what was going on and asked to have her face done. I remembered the Word of life, "Authentic worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth."

True worship meant loving service of my neighbor too, so my dilemma was easily solved. I told her to go and ask her Mom and she came back with her brother and a jubilant "yes"! So I painted their faces and took all their pictures and got them developed. My husband offered to take them to the station in order to meet the deadline in time.

The children were already planning the celebration for having won. My husband and I were even getting excited.

Then after a five day wait we heard the news. My neighbor called to say her little girl had been named a semi-finalist. My very first sensation was one of pain, because I knew my children had not been called. But I quickly gave my "yes" to Jesus and became caught up in her joy. My joy however was short-lived because I then had to tell the children. I saw their disappointment. We talked about this experience together and we decided in unity to forget ourselves and love our new friends and be happy with them. So the children and I went over to wish the family good luck.

Everything changed immediately for us. We became excited and hopeful for the little girl to win. Nothing else mattered as we waited for the radio announcer to say who won that night.

She indeed won! We all jumped up and down and let out a holler! We couldn't stop congratulating her.
Later, my husband and I told our own children how proud we were of their actions and their decision to love and embrace our own disappointment.

A few days later my neighbor called and invited us to go to the circus as their guests on the big night! We were overwhelmed. It was a beautiful hundredfold.

P. A.

A change of attitude

Since my husband has been working nights, from 4 p.m. to 12 midnight, it has been hard for him to sleep when he gets home in the morning. This is because of our two older children who at that time are getting ready for school and the baby who wakes up wanting to be fed.

One morning the baby was crying and it was particularly noisy. My husband got up, went to the garage and got a fan for the bedroom to block out the noise from the rest of the house. On his way down the hall he grumbled, "I have not been able to sleep since I started working this shift." My temper flared. "It was your choice," I felt like saying, "to work nights! How can I keep three children quiet in the morning"?

At this point I saw the word of life. It was right there in front of me: 'Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment" (Mt 5:22). I knew right away I couldn't be angry with my husband. I had to change my attitude, and love him by trying to keep the house as quiet as possible.

After the children left for school and while the baby was napping, my husband awoke. I apologized to him without trying to justify myself. He in return, said he should have put the fan in the room from the first day.

The Word of life helped us reestablish unity.

L.L.

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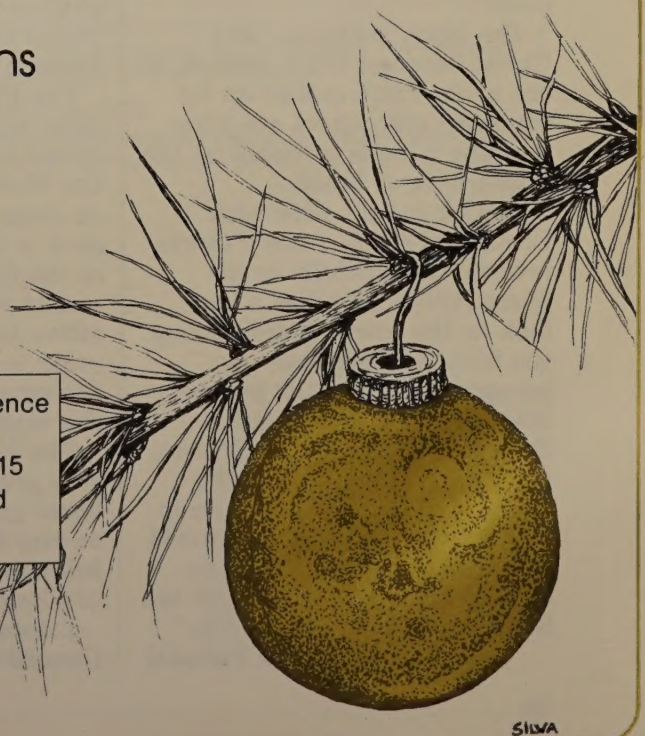

(Continued from page 17)

day cares. Everyone is teary-eyed, even the most hardened and embittered by life. There are many conversions to God. Francis too wipes his eyes continuously for more than the painful illness which will eventually lead to his blindness.

In his enthusiasm, Francis now approaches the crib which is warmed by the breath of the animals, tenderly lifts up the child that is lying in it and embraces it as if it were a real infant. Giovanni's heart misses a beat—he cannot believe his eyes. The lifeless statue is transformed. What Francis is holding in his arms is a tiny body which has lost all its former stiffness. The child is so soft and helpless. As if awakening from sleep the baby opens its eyes just for a moment. In a flash it is over. The little statue is placed back on the straw. Did anyone else see it? No, Giovanni alone witnessed the event.

The Mass continues and Christ becomes truly present on the altar. Faith makes up for what the eye cannot see since now the miracle is veiled by the appearance of bread.

The air is still alive with Christmas carols when Francis returns thoughtfully to his friary. While he takes a last look at the town hidden among the hills, he spontaneously paraphrases what the prophet Micah had written about Bethlehem: "And you, Greccio, are not the least among the villages of this land because in you for the first time the world has relived and seen with its own eyes the discomforts of the Son of God lying in the crib."

Oreste Paleotti

(Continued from page 19)

and Sacraments" was discussed after papers were presented on how each of the two Churches view the subject. A fruitful dialogue resulted. The prayerful and fraternal atmosphere that characterized the week made it possible to deal with the most sensitive areas between Catholics and Pentecostals. The methodology of this dialogue, in fact, includes presenting "tough questions" to each other for further elaboration. The answers are worked on and then presented in the plenary sessions. This method has proved to be very helpful in clarifying differences and commonly held views.

Gabriella Fallacara

The Arduous Path toward Convergence

Max Thurian, the Reformed Church theologian from Taize, has compiled the third volume in the series: "The Church Responds to BEM." The book contains the official responses of 37 churches to the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry document drawn up by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. This brings to 170 the number of Churches, members of the World Council of Churches, which have submitted replies.

The Faith and Order Movement was one of three movements which merged to form the World Council of Churches on August 23, 1948. Its purpose is to proclaim the oneness of the Church of Jesus Christ and to call the Churches to strive toward the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic community so that the world may believe.

The Faith and Order Commission promotes ecumenical dialogue on the theological level among the over 300 Churches belonging to the World Council of Churches.

Liason between the World Council of Churches and the Vatican has been maintained since 1966 through a joint working group. Although the Catholic Church is not a member, twelve Catholic theologians from around the world serve as full members of the Faith and Order Commission.

The Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry document of the Commission is also known as the "Lima text" because the final text was issued at a meeting held in 1982 in Lima, Peru. Its three fundamental themes have been undergoing study since then. The text of the document has been translated into thirty languages.

There is not as yet complete convergence on the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry document and for this reason each member Church has been examining it in the light of its own doctrine and giving it its own evaluation.

The Faith and Order Commission will then continue work on the document after considering all the responses. It is a slow process but an important one for the ecumenical journey.

Gabriella Fallacara

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

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